FAITH AND UNITY

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UNITY IN THE TRUTH

The sermon preached by the REV. A. H. REES, *Vicar of Chiswick, at the High Mass at All Saints, Margaret Street, W.* 1, *on November 22nd*, 1951.

"*Sanctify them through Thy Truth, Thy word is Truth*"
(St. John 17. 17).

More than once in our lifetime we have had bitter cause to realize that an armistice is not the same thing as peace. There were those who maintained that the whole period from 1918 to 1939 was in the nature of an armistice and some of you may remember at the beginning of the last war the appearance of a book entitled *The End of the Armistice*.

For some time now there has been something of a religious armistice between the various Christian denominations, though from time to time there breaks out a certain amount of irresponsible sniping from either side. We should, however, be very much mistaken if we identify this armistice with peace. The first widespread movement towards religious toleration since the Reformation took place in Germany at the end of the Thirty Years' War and that movement for toleration was much more the fruit of exhaustion and indifference than of genuine religious concord, still less of unity in religious belief.

I must not be led astray by enthusiasm for my metaphor so far as to call the Church of England a "No Man's Land". The somewhat ill-considered phrase current some while ago which described her as a Bridge Church was killed once for all by the pungent comment that men make use of a bridge for crossing to one side or the other, but certainly never for building their homes upon. But the intervening space between two violently opposed combatants is at least useful for parley and possibly for terms of agreement, and it is in that sense that we of the Church of England have a special opportunity and responsibility.

We must emphasize the fact that there can be no religious peace without agreement in faith and that that agreement must on no account be an agreement to differ, or an agreement to keep silent, on things which are of the essence of our religion. Church History is full of attempts to quench religious controversy by imposing on both sides a formula which gives no clear decision on the matter in dispute, but which each party can interpret according to its own partisan views. It was a favourite device of the Byzantine Emperors to attempt to secure religious unity by imposing an external uniformity. The *Henoticon* of Zeno, the *Ecthesis* of Heraclius, the *Typus* of Constans are instances of this kind of formula. It was of this practice that Pusey wrote when he spoke of the disastrous use of authority "at a very critical time for the suppression of the truth equally with heresy . . . one of those miserable compromises by which unbelief is always the sole gainer".

Such agreements to conceal disagreements behind the façade of a formula have proved invariably a victory not for truth but for falsehood, for there appears to be a kind of Gresham's Law in doctrinal matters, as much as in financial, whereby if two doctrinal versions of the same article of faith are allowed to exist side by side the lower or less supernatural tends invariably to drive out the higher. So it was with the union between Lutherans and Calvinists by which the Prussian State Church was constituted in the early nineteenth century. According to the formula of the union each side was to retain its own eucharistic doctrine. The result was that the Receptionist doctrine of the Calvinists prevailed rather than the more Catholic doctrine of the Lutherans. The aim of such State-promoted Schemes of Union is, in truth, not religious unity at all, but ecclesiastical uniformity; and surely there cannot be any grosser formalism than to insist on Christian worshippers doing and saying the same things without any agreement as to what they mean by them. It is for this reason that the distinction so often made in reunion discussions between matters of Faith and matters of Order is an unreal and treacherous one. To accept episcopacy as a convenient or traditional method of church government, while agreeing to say nothing as to its divine appointment or otherwise, is to leave the way open for future controversy and recrimination. It is noteworthy that where episcopacy has been accepted on these terms, as in the Church of South India, no member of the church is required to recite the creeds as an act of belief or an explicit profession of faith.

If, on the one hand, we fully recognize that a cease-fire is by no means the same thing as the signing of the peace treaty, we are bound also to admit that on all sides in religious controversy tactical positions have been taken up under stress of warfare which need not now be maintained and many of which are in fact untenable. A moment's reflection will show that many of these tactical positions have been already abandoned. The most zealous champion of the spiritual prerogatives of the Papacy will not at the present day think it necessary to assert the right of the Pope to depose heretical monarchs. Yet in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries this was affirmed by Roman Catholic theologians of the greatest eminence as an article of faith. We on the other hand no longer think it necessary to refer in our public worship to "the tyranny of the Bishop of Rome and all his detestable enormities". So far from being committed either to affirmation or repudiation of his spiritual claims, the only official pronouncement of the Church of England on the Papacy occurs in the Article of Religion entitled "Of Civil Magistrates". Nor, to turn our attention to other Christian denominations, do we any longer regard the penalization of dissenters and their exclusion from public office as necessary to the maintenance of the established church and they on their side no longer see fit to refer to the Church of England as "Antichrist" or "the Synagogue of Satan".

It is surely high time that we distinguished those positions which cannot be abandoned without sacrifice of principle from the tactical positions which have been taken up in order to secure controversial advantage. Love of truth no less than charity surely obliges us to discard once for all the often disreputable weapons that have been forged in the heat of controversy and snatched up desperately when our backs were to the wall. The Papal condemnation of Anglican Orders has not meant, as the English Roman Catholics at the time were confident it would mean, the wholesale abandonment of the Church of England by Catholics within her fold. The cause of Christian Unity is better served by single-minded adherence to the truth rather than by pronouncements which aim at sectarian advantage.

"Sanctify them through Thy truth"; so prayed our Divine Master before His Passion; and it will be that single-minded adherence to truth which will guard Christians against advocating only those schemes of union which safeguard their cherished prejudices or flatter their conviction that they are in all things in the right. "Let him take heed," said Bramhall of Richard Baxter, "that his love of unity prove not to be self-love which insinuateth itself strangely into the most holy actions and designs. All men could be contented to have others united to themselves and to chop off or stretch out the religion of their brethren, as Procrustes did his guests, according to the measure of his own bed. I doubt not but he would be well pleased to have Independency stretched up to an ordained 'Ministry' (as he calleth it) and Episcopacy let down to a Presbyterian parity or rather to an empty show of equality; for I never yet observed but one or two single popular presbyters ruled the whole consistory and had more absolute arbitrary power than ever any Bishop pretended unto. If this be all his love and desire of unity, to have antiquity, universality and the perpetual regiment of the Church to be levelled and moduled according to private fantasies, it is mere self-love, no love of unity. But I hope better, though I fear worse."

If we on our side are prepared to take to heart these warnings uttered by our own Divine, we may also legitimately ask our separated brethren to consider whether in fact the positions which they now regard as essential to their religion were in their origin integral to the faith which they profess. Is it not a fact that the episcopate was not deliberately rejected by the Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century nor willingly abandoned? The late Professor Whitney stated that Lutheranism had "generally shown a sense of loss in respect of the episcopate" and it could be shown that the same is true of the Calvinists.

When delegates from the Church of England attended the Synod of Dort in 1619 they found themselves the only episcopalians present among Protestants who had adopted the presbyterian system, and when, undeterred by this fact, they emphasized the difference between them, and the necessity to the Church of Bishops as successors of the Apostles, no repudiation of episcopacy as such was forthcoming from the other side. They merely stated that they had "a great honour for the good order and discipline of the Church of England and heartily wished they could establish themselves upon this mode. But they had no prospect of such happiness and since the Civil Government had made their desires impracticable they hoped God would be merciful to them."

Or again let us consider the origin of the Methodist Ministry. Here is what Dr. Ryder Smith wrote in 1920: "The plain facts are that the Methodist Ministry grew up pragmatically; that it grew out of the Societies and was not derived from Bishops, and at first it was not sharply distinguished from the other spiritual offices of Methodism, as appears for instance from the fact that it was quite common in Wesley's day for a 'travelling' preacher to become again a 'local', that as a consequence of these facts it has never been easy in Methodism to answer the question: What is the theoretical difference between a minister and a layman? and that, apart from the repudiation of sacerdotalism, there has never been an agreed Methodist answer to this question." It is, therefore, no matter for surprise that the Methodist Conference of 1933 resolved that "Where it can be shown that any Church is deprived of a reasonably frequent and regular administration through lack of Ministers, the circuit concerned may apply to Conference for the authorization of persons other than ministers to administer the Sacrament."

But while we ask other Christian denominations to reconsider their position on the Ministry in the light of historical facts, we owe it to them to remember that the demand made of the Church of England by the Independents at the crucial moment of 1661 was for synodical government, that is to say for government not by autocratic Prelates but by Bishops ruling their dioceses in synodical consultation with their clergy. That demand was a Catholic demand and it has not yet been granted. It may be that we shall not succeed in commending the Catholic doctrine of Episcopacy to our separated brethren until it is granted. Such at least was the opinion of Thorndike, one of the most conciliatory of the members of the Savoy Conference of 1661: "So evident is the right of synods, clergy and people in the making of those of whom they consist, and by whom they are to be governed, that I need mark no other reason for the neglect of episcopacy but the neglect of it."

Perhaps it is in recourse to the precedents of Church History that we shall find not only a "cordial for drooping spirits" but light upon the way forward to Christian Reunion. "Let no man so abuse himself," said Thorndike again, "as to imagine that the way to peace in this church is to authorize both parties, but to oblige both parties to stand to that which it may appear that the ancient Church is agreed upon." It is there that we shall find, not denominational appeasement, but religious peace, that peace through the truth for which our Blessed Lord prayed on the night before His Passion.

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be put first. In the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles we find the breaking of the bread and the prayers, together with the preaching and teaching, as the special function of the apostles. This, from the beginning, they retained, and it was the secondary work of serving tables that was delegated to others. The bishops of our day, as the successors of the Apostles, continue to be the principal ministers of the Church's fundamental duty of worship, as the Body of Christ.

ROBERT BAKER, C.R.

(*To be continued.*)

EPISCOPACY

A second extract from the article, " One Church, One Faith, One Lord ", reprinted by permission from " C.R.", No. 196, Christmas, 1951.

All this has prepared us for passing on to what is meant by episcopacy. The Report is so vague that one wonders whether Free Churchmen will be drawn to accept an institution set before them in so indefinite a way. No doubt many would be ready to accept some kind of superintendency to which the title of Bishop might be given. That is the case in the American Methodist Episcopal body at the present time, and a prominent Congregationalist minister in Africa once said that he saw no difficulty in uniting on a basis of episcopacy in a similar form, since it already existed without the name in many of the Free Churches.

On page 38 the Report states that " episcopacy cannot be offered to or accepted by the Free Churches as a mere matter of expediency or in a completely undefined form. It is also recognized both by Anglicans and Free Churchmen that Bishops form but one part of the ministry of the Church ". This last statement we readily admit, but our Ordinal makes it clear that episcopacy is essential to the continuance of the Church's ministry. This was categorically asserted when circumstances forced the Anglican episcopate in South Africa to form itself into a voluntary association. Bishop Gray of Capetown wrote to the Bishop of Grahamstown in 1865: " We bishops are the only essential parts of this voluntary association, and all steps towards organization must formally proceed from us."

We need, however, to go further in our examination. The Bishop is the principal minister and representative of Christ in the local Church. We find our Lord saying to His apostles: " All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth " (Matt. 28. 18), and in another place: " As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you " (John 20. 21). But our Lord did not utter these words to the apostles as to individuals, but to them as a group, a body. They passed on their authority to others, and the Bishop has ever acted in the Church as a member of the corporate Apostolate into which he is brought by consecration.

By episcopal consecration a man is set aside by other bishops by the laying on of hands with prayer, through which the Holy Ghost conveys to him the divine grace requisite for the fulfilment of his functions. The essential functions of a Bishop may be regarded as towards God, towards the Church, and towards the world. As with the rest of us, a bishop's duty towards God must

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CEYLON AND REUNION

It would be difficult in these days for any informed Churchman to be a "little Englander" in his religion. Apart from other reminders of the activities of the Church in the world, he can never be sure that he will not open his newspaper to-morrow to find news of a fresh reunion scheme in some part of the world. In 1951, the words "Derby Report" came to mean either a report on Church Relations in England, or between England and Scotland, or one on reunion in Ceylon. It is with this latter that we are here concerned.

CEYLON AND SOUTH INDIA

The Ceylon Scheme has always in some respects been an improvement on that of South India. The "Derby Report" rightly emphasizes this in one important respect: "The most far-reaching difference between the two projects is the provision whereby the Church of Lanka (sc. Ceylon) proposes to avoid the difficulties of any interim period by securing a full unification of the ministries of the several Churches from the beginning." This is a commendable desire; the problems arise in the attempt to put it into force. The provision of a uniform rite to be administered indiscriminately to those who have already received the priesthood and to those who have not, raises the question as to its real significance in any particular case. The Derby Committee is sufficiently content about this; "in our judgment," they say, "there should be no difficulties from the Anglican side."

For Anglicans the real question is whether the rite can be properly regarded as a conditional ordination to the priesthood. For Non-Anglicans it is whether that is in fact something that they can accept.

RELATIONS WITH NON-EPISCOPAL BODIES

Two points are, however, selected in the "Derby Report" as "likely to give rise to heart-searching". The first is concerned with the intention that the new body should remain in communion with all its "parent bodies". Here we have a clear issue which can be considered apart from the study of geography and local conditions. The Derby Committee rightly points this out: "in the interests of reunion generally, the issue is one with regard to which the Anglican Churches must in the near future reach a decision". That the Church of England itself must do so becomes clear from a consideration of the document "Church Relations in England". Those who wish to see the issues behind the question clarified should read the Church Union's document, "The Church of England and the Free Churches." If they do so, they will realize that there is a fundamental confusion behind the suggestion that the Church can only be in communion with episcopal bodies, but may do so while they are in communion with non-episcopal ones.

VISITING MINISTERS

The other major problem arises from the willingness of the Church in Ceylon (if it accepts the Reunion Scheme) to allow visiting ministers who have not received the priesthood to celebrate Holy Communion. The Derby Committee "as a whole" is prepared to regard this as "a matter internal to the discipline of the Church of Lanka". It is, however, much more than a question of discipline. The meaning of the proposed new Church's adherence to the threefold ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons is to be understood by how it acts in such matters as this. It would seem to show conclusively that the Catholic doctrine of priesthood would be ruled out by such a provision.

DETAILED CRITICISMS

A number of detailed suggestions are made by the Derby Committee, and would certainly improve the Scheme in many ways. We need not here review them all. One, however, calls perhaps for special comment. The Derby Committee rightly proposes the deletion of the word "further" from the statement: "The Order of Confirmation shall provide further for prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit." It would appear that we have not yet made clear to our Protestant friends that our devotion to the Sacrament of Confirmation depends on our belief that by it the gift of the Spirit is made. It is not primarily a dignified and ceremonious way of approaching our first Communion.

PRACTICE AND PRINCIPLE

As in all reunion schemes, the thing that most matters is the expression of true principles of Church life. A loyalty to principle may easily slow down the production of reunion schemes, but it is in the end only by a love of truth that we shall build on secure foundations. The Ceylon Scheme itself challenges us to consider some of the implications of the truths we hold. If the Church in Ceylon rightly appreciates their meaning, the Scheme, though inadequate in its present form, will not have been lost labour.

HAROLD RILEY.

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